

BSFG President's Report 2023/24

Rather than reflect on just the past 12 months, I would like to comment on the five years during which I have been President.

Over the 31 years I have lived in Benalla and Lima East, I have been President or Chairperson of many and varied organisations and committees, but when I somewhat apprehensively became President of BSFG in May 2019, I felt that this role carried with it an enormous responsibility – not just for the BSFG membership, but to the wider community, and especially for the future generations of residents of Benalla and district.

That is why I have tried to promote important events and information sessions through our local secondary schools, print and social media, and other organisations which may be related to the particular events. With this approach, I have been so grateful to the people who have served as either committee members, or organisers of events, or produced newsletters, because their enthusiasm and expertise has been amazing, and has helped alleviate my initial level of apprehension. Within our organisation, there is such a diverse range of interests and concerns for the future sustainability of the planet, such that it is impossible for any one person to grasp all the concepts involved. That is why BSFG has Action Groups that allow people to work within their spheres of interests and abilities to make a difference within our community, and as the years have passed, I believe that each of the Action Groups have contributed to better outcomes, and greater awareness of the issues, for residents of Benalla and district.

In the recent newsletter, I mentioned in my President's comment that urgent action on climate change mitigation was "my thing" during my time as President. I sincerely hope that our Benalla Councillors present tonight will take back to their fellow Councillors and Council officers the sense of urgency that we in BSFG have felt for a very long time. We, as individuals can only achieve small steps by modifying our own lifestyles, but each level of governance that we have in Australia can make contributions, either through actions or legislation, that will make large differences to the future wellbeing of our communities. I hope that tonight's presentation and discussion will open our eyes, not just to the threats climate change imposes, but to the possible actions that can be taken to address and mitigate these threats. This is not an easy or simple task, but it is one that cannot, and must not, be continually placed on the "to do" list. We in BSFG, are ready and willing to work alongside Council to tackle this task, so would like to be able to contribute more directly to the relevant discussions and planning centred on climate change mitigation. Without pre-empting tonight's discussion too much, it is already evident within Australia, that a number of communities have become unsustainable due to climate related events, and this number will continue to grow, not just due to their location in low lying coastal areas, but for other reasons such as economic or health related issues.

Finally, again I want to thank all those who have contributed to the work of BSFG over the years, to acknowledge the support I have received from all the committee members and others over the past five years, and also to thank David for accepting the role of President for the near future, and the members who have agreed to continue on the committee. I look forward to another year of informative, interesting, and progressive events.

Peter Holmes